

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEBRASKA

CHABRE NATHANIEL JOHNSON,

Petitioner,

vs.

SCOTT R. FRAKES,

Respondent.

8:22CV68

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

This matter is before the court on preliminary review of Petitioner Chabre Nathaniel Johnson's Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (filing 1) brought pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The purpose of this review is to determine whether Petitioner's claims, when liberally construed, are potentially cognizable in federal court. Condensed and summarized for clarity, Petitioner's claims are:

Claim One: The prosecution committed prosecutorial misconduct at Petitioner's sentencing hearing by falsifying and manufacturing evidence from the presentencing report in violation of Petitioner's due process rights under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.

Claim Two: Petitioner was denied due process and the effective assistance of counsel because (1) trial counsel failed to object to the prosecution's prosecutorial misconduct and (2) appellate counsel failed to raise trial counsel's ineffectiveness on direct appeal.¹

¹ Claim Two combines Grounds Two and Three of the habeas petition. (Filing 1 at CM/ECF pp. 22–25.)

Claim Three: The state district court denied Petitioner access to the audio recording of his sentencing hearing and prevented Petitioner from substantiating his claim of falsification of the bill of exceptions in violation of his rights to due process and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Claim Four: The sentencing judge was biased and imposed an excessive sentence against Petitioner in violation of his rights under the Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments.

Claim Five: Petitioner was denied due process and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances under the First, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments because the state district court denied his motion to amend his postconviction motion.

Claim Six: The Nebraska Postconviction Act does not allow adequate review of Petitioner's constitutional claims in violation of Petitioner's rights to due process and equal protection under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.

With the exception of Claims Five and Six, the court determines that these claims, when liberally construed, are potentially cognizable in federal court. However, the court cautions Petitioner that no determination has been made regarding the merits of these claims or any defenses to them or whether there are procedural bars that will prevent Petitioner from obtaining the relief sought. Claims Five and Six are not cognizable in a federal habeas action as they are based on errors in the state postconviction proceedings. Errors during state postconviction review are not cognizable in a federal habeas corpus action. *See Bell-Bey v. Roper*, 499 F.3d 752, 756 (8th Cir. 2007) (“Because the Constitution

does not guarantee the existence of state post-conviction proceedings, an infirmity in a state post-conviction proceeding does not raise a constitutional issue cognizable in a federal habeas application.” (cleaned up)); *Jenkins v. Houston*, 4:05CV3099, 2006 WL 126632 (D. Neb. 2006) (collecting cases). **Claims Five and Six are dismissed.**

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that:

1. Upon initial review of the habeas corpus petition (filing 1), the court preliminarily determines that Petitioner’s claims, as they are set forth in this Memorandum and Order, are potentially cognizable in federal court. **Claims Five and Six are dismissed.**

2. By **July 7, 2022**, Respondent must file a motion for summary judgment or state court records in support of an answer. The clerk of the court is directed to set a pro se case management deadline in this case using the following text: **July 7, 2022**: deadline for Respondent to file state court records in support of answer or motion for summary judgment.

3. If Respondent elects to file a motion for summary judgment, the following procedures must be followed by Respondent and Petitioner:

- A. The motion for summary judgment must be accompanied by a separate brief, submitted at the time the motion is filed.
- B. The motion for summary judgment must be supported by any state court records that are necessary to support the motion. Those records must be contained in a separate filing entitled: “Designation of State Court Records in Support of Motion for Summary Judgment.”

- C. Copies of the motion for summary judgment, the designation, including state court records, and Respondent's brief must be served on Petitioner *except* that Respondent is only required to provide Petitioner with a copy of the specific pages of the record that are cited in Respondent's motion and brief. In the event that the designation of state court records is deemed insufficient by Petitioner or Petitioner needs additional records from the designation, Petitioner may file a motion with the court requesting additional documents. Such motion must set forth the documents requested and the reasons the documents are relevant to the cognizable claims.
- D. No later than 30 days following the filing of the motion for summary judgment, Petitioner must file and serve a brief in opposition to the motion for summary judgment. Petitioner may not submit other documents unless directed to do so by the court.
- E. No later than 30 days after Petitioner's brief is filed, Respondent must file and serve a reply brief. In the event that Respondent elects not to file a reply brief, he should inform the court by filing a notice stating that he will not file a reply brief and that the motion is therefore fully submitted for decision.
- F. If the motion for summary judgment is denied, Respondent must file an answer, a designation and a brief that complies with terms of this order. (*See* the following paragraph.) The documents must be filed no later than 30 days after the denial of the motion for summary judgment. **Respondent is warned that failure to file an answer, a designation and a brief in a timely fashion may result in the imposition of sanctions, including Petitioner's release.**

4. If Respondent elects to file an answer, the following procedures must be followed by Respondent and Petitioner:

- A. By **July 7, 2022**, Respondent must file all state court records that are relevant to the cognizable claims. *See, e.g.*, Rule 5(c)-(d) of the *Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts*. Those records must be contained in a separate filing entitled: “Designation of State Court Records in Support of Answer.”
- B. No later than 30 days after the relevant state court records are filed, Respondent must file an answer. The answer must be accompanied by a separate brief, submitted at the time the answer is filed. Both the answer and the brief must address all matters germane to the case including, but not limited to, the merits of Petitioner’s allegations that have survived initial review, and whether any claim is barred by a failure to exhaust state remedies, a procedural bar, non-retroactivity, a statute of limitations, or because the petition is an unauthorized second or successive petition. *See, e.g.*, Rules 5(b) and 9 of the *Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts*.
- C. Copies of the answer, the designation, and Respondent’s brief must be served on Petitioner at the time they are filed with the court *except* that Respondent is only required to provide Petitioner with a copy of the specific pages of the designated record that are cited in Respondent’s answer and brief. In the event that the designation of state court records is deemed insufficient by Petitioner or Petitioner needs additional records from the designation, Petitioner may file a motion with the

court requesting additional documents. Such motion must set forth the documents requested and the reasons the documents are relevant to the cognizable claims.

- D. No later than 30 days after Respondent's brief is filed, Petitioner must file and serve a brief in response. Petitioner must not submit any other documents unless directed to do so by the court.
- E. No later than 30 days after Petitioner's brief is filed, Respondent must file and serve a reply brief. In the event that Respondent elects not to file a reply brief, he should inform the court by filing a notice stating that he will not file a reply brief and that the merits of the petition are therefore fully submitted for decision.
- F. The clerk of the court is directed to set a pro se case management deadline in this case using the following text: **August 8, 2022:** check for Respondent's answer and separate brief.

5. No discovery shall be undertaken without leave of the court. *See Rule 6 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts.*

Dated this 23rd day of May, 2022.

BY THE COURT:



Richard G. Kopf
Senior United States District Judge